



New bricks  
The welcoming  
interiors of  
Officina Slowear  
on Milan's via  
Solferino

# The slow sell

Slowear's stores feel like the apartment of a good friend. With a very large wardrobe

PHOTOGRAPHY ANDREA GARUTI WRITER JOSH SIMS

Both Roberto [Compagno, Slowear's co-owner] and I are fascinated by Scandinavian furniture from the 1940s and 1950s,' says Carlo Donati. 'It has become a competition. I'll call him from New York and say "I've just found these amazing armchairs," then he'll call me from Copenhagen with his discoveries. It's a passion we share.' One, indeed, that has played a part in giving Slowear's new flagship stores a certain relaxed atmosphere that distinguishes them from the cookie-cutter international aesthetic of the luxury brand giants. That, at least, has been Donati's intention – as head of the Carlo Donati architectural studio in Milan, he was charged with creating it.

Exemplified by the Milan flagship, the result comprises lots of bookshelves, exposed brickwork, vintage furniture and big display tables around which the action takes place – like mama's kitchen table. In short, it is the Italian modernist's home-from-home. 'It was that homely touch that we wanted to capture above all,' says Donati, 'a mix and match feel that's 60 per cent commercial identity but 40 per cent really just its own place. It seems to work – people like to just come in and sit around. Although hopefully that also means they stay long enough to buy something...'

The design is not without its quirks. The bespoke furniture may be inspired by the likes of Jean Prouvé and Charlotte Perriand but its sophistication is likely to be undercut. A cupboard, for example, is all clean lines but opens to reveal the inside-back covered with wallpaper, while the brickwork is not married with the expected stripped wood flooring but a lush red carpet. 'Everybody wanted a wooden floor of course,' says Donati, 'simply because that is what they have grown used to seeing. Carpet still has that 1970s connotation too – and the past is tricky for some people. So that's why we went for it; it just creates a more dynamic dialogue with the brick.'

And who can cosy up on bare floorboards, however fashionable? Or doesn't enjoy the patina of genuinely





Dream factory  
Carefully collected vintage design  
pieces are stored at Slowear's  
HQ in Venice before finding homes  
at Slowear stores



vintage design? ‘You can take new furniture and make it look old of course,’ says Donati, ‘but it never really works. It looks fake.’ So there’s an early 20th century pharmacy counter in the Treviso store and a 1920s English atelier window in Milan. Rather than anything too high concept, Donati argues that Slowear’s move towards a more domestic retail environment is indicative of both a simple shift in trends away from ‘sterile spaces’ but also of a new mood among consumers, as tighter economic times encourage a ‘less but better’ shopping ethos.

Donati completed the stores’ interiors on a decidedly unflashy budget: ‘No marble, no steel, no expensive glass,’ Donati exclaims, ‘but a challenge to think in a different creative way all the same.’ Such a cost-conscious approach makes a lot of sense given that Slowear aims to maintain its levels of in-store individuality wherever it opens a shop. It even has a growing collection of vintage shop fittings and midcentury pieces stockpiled and waiting for the right home. And given that considerable expansion is planned, they are going to need them: the company has stated that it plans to open some ten new stores and 20 franchises under the Officina Slowear name over the next three years, helping to push expected sales up over \$100m by the end of this year.

‘The style of the Slowear stores is very much about encouraging an easier, less hurried way of shopping, in which you’re persuaded to touch and browse and just maybe buy,’ says Donati. ‘I think we’re all tired of the pushy, showy design of the 1980s, or the cool minimalism of the 1990s, or even that brand habit of making shops look the same whether they’re in Dallas or Dubai. We want personality now, places that just feel good to be in, rather than offer a theatrical experience.’

Compagno often refers to the labels under the Slowear umbrella as ‘slower brands’ because they each reflect a specialisation in one type of garment and because each is designed with the ‘aim of surviving fleeting trends and fast consumerism’. A progressive response to this is all the more important as a means for bricks and mortar stores to compete with internet retailers. Increasingly, the



Talk shop  
Vintage pieces  
and new travel  
accessories  
on display on  
via Solferino

former are seeking to create experiential or just plain relaxing spaces that are more manifestations of brand values than means to a hard sell.

And, just as Slowear has been well ahead of the game in adopting its slow fashion philosophy over a decade ago, it is now taking an holistic approach in expressing this through its stores too. Their interiors are, in effect, echoes of the ethos of the clothing found on the shelves. ‘Some clothes are rough and relaxed; others sophisticated in that Italian way,’ says Donati. ‘But they all share the idea of being above fashion in some way – clothes you want to keep for years, that could become vintage in the future. And these are not fashionable shops either. They just feel good to be in.’